

Pace to add new, quicker bus service for some city and suburban arterial routes

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Mary Wisniewski

Riding a bus in suburbia could be getting faster.

Pace, which is already using "bus-on-shoulder" riding to reduce travel times for riders on the Jane Addams Tollway and Interstate 55, is now planning new, quicker bus service for some city and suburban arterial routes.

Pace hopes to put Pulse, an express route with fewer stops and other features to provide faster service, on Milwaukee Avenue, Dempster Street, Harlem Avenue, Cermak Road, Halsted Street, 95th Street and Roosevelt Road. The Milwaukee route is expected to start next year — others are still in the planning stages. The Pulse service would be in addition to existing CTA and Pace service on the routes.

The Active Transportation Alliance, which advocates for transit, biking and walking, and which offered feedback to Pace on the Pulse project, said the service would help speed transit travel between suburbs and city neighborhoods.

It is often harder to use public transit between suburban communities and some city neighborhoods, as opposed to traveling in and out of downtown, said Kyle Whitehead, the alliance's government relations director. While Chicago's downtown is well-served by CTA "L" and Metra lines, suburb-to-suburb options are more limited, with buses either not available or hampered by heavy traffic.

"We think the focus is in the right place in terms of frequency, speed and reliability," said Whitehead, who noted that many of these routes would not be appropriate for rail service. "We know those are factors that really drive people to choose transit over alternative modes."

The first Pulse route will be on Milwaukee between the Jefferson Park Transit Center and the Golf Mill Shopping Center — Pace hopes to break ground on new boarding stations by the year's end, Pace spokeswoman Maggie Daly Skogsbakken said. The project is a few months behind schedule due to permitting issues.

The next project in the queue is new Dempster Street service from the Davis Street CTA station in downtown Evanston to the "Kiss 'n' Fly" lot at O'Hare International Airport. That service is due to begin in 2020, according to Pace's online project schedule.

Pulse bus routes will have less frequent stops than other bus service and will use raised boarding platforms that allow passengers to step onto the bus instead of climbing stairs, which will increase boarding speed, Skogsbakken explained.

Another feature will be traffic signal priority, which allows buses to electronically communicate with stoplights to keep a green light for a few more seconds, thus allowing an approaching bus to clear the intersection.

The services on Milwaukee and Dempster will not, however, have dedicated bus lanes, which is part of what's considered true bus rapid transit, noted Skogsbakken. Dedicated lanes are being considered for other routes.

Pace has been coordinating with the CTA to make sure the two services complement and don't interfere with each other, Skogsbakken said.

The Milwaukee project is being funded by federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality money as well as Pace operating funds, for total construction costs of about \$9.5 million plus \$4.5 million for new buses with Wi-Fi and USB charging ports. Pace is seeking funding for other Pulse projects.

Pace and the CTA will soon start a joint study, funded by a \$500,000 Cook County "Invest" grant, to improve service along South Halsted Street from the 79th Street Red Line station to the Pace Harvey Transportation Center, Skogsbakken said.

Van Buren Bridge closing

The Jane Byrne Interchange Project continues to cause heartburn for area drivers.

Starting on Monday, the Van Buren Street bridge over the Kennedy Expressway between Halsted and Des Plaines streets will be closed until next summer for construction, according to the [Illinois Department of Transportation](#). Detour signs will be posted for drivers.

The bridge replacement, which will include traffic signal and lighting improvements, is part of the ongoing \$475 million overhaul of the interchange that links the Kennedy, the Dan Ryan Expressway and Congress Parkway.



The project is designed to relieve congestion and improve safety at one of the country's worst bottlenecks, and is expected to be completed in the fall of 2021, IDOT said.

But waiting in construction traffic is not the most fun way to remember Jane Byrne, the mayor who made "The Blues Brothers" possible.

New red light cameras

A warning to drivers who pass through the intersection at Central, Foster and Milwaukee avenues — those new red light cameras will start issuing tickets this Friday.

The cameras were turned on Sept. 29 at the Jefferson Park intersection, but violations were not issued for the first two weeks. Failure to stop at red lights will result in \$100 fines.

The placement follows a study released last March by the Northwestern University Transportation Center on the camera program, which recommended moving some existing cameras to other locations.

The Chicago Department of Transportation expects to announce dates soon for community meetings regarding the relocation of red light cameras downtown, spokesman Mike Claffey said.

Midway security update

Mayor Rahm Emanuel late last week broke ground on a new, \$104 million security checkpoint and bridge expansion project at Midway International Airport.

When finished in 2019, the 80,000-square-foot security pavilion will allow for additional security lanes, better technology and a single checkpoint system to double Transportation Security Administration screening capacity, which should make things quicker for passengers, according to the city.

The improvements, which will widen the current screening area from about 50 feet to about 400 feet, are being paid for by passenger facility charges tacked onto the purchase of plane tickets, not local tax dollars, according to Lauren Huffman, a spokeswoman for the city's Department of Aviation. The construction will be in phases to minimize impact on passengers moving through the checkpoint, Huffman said.

The new checkpoint is part of the \$323 million Midway Modernization Program, which includes new concessions and a terminal parking garage.

The security additions are to meet expected passenger demand — the Federal Aviation Administration estimates that U.S. air travel will double in the next 20 years, according to the city.

Collect My Metra Ticket!

Last week, Tribune colleague Kyle Bente and I did a story about how Metra had expanded its payroll by 32 percent over the past five years. The article told of Metra's budget problems and its desire for another fare increase to help make up an operating deficit. If the board approves the hike, it would be the fourth in four years.

I have heard from readers complaining that Metra conductors do not always collect tickets, and how that may be one cause of its problems. Here's one letter:

"I am a little concerned about another fare increase. I ride the Union Pacific Northwest line out of Mt. Prospect every day and buy a monthly ticket. I would say it is on time most of the time but I wouldn't give it 95%. Most of the delays are due to freight train interference or mechanical problems. ...

"I also ride the train on weekends and non-rush hour times during the week, to go to the race

track, Cubs game or other activities in the suburbs or city. Almost all of the time, a trainman never collected tickets. You have a crowded train and no one is collecting tickets? I have a hard time blaming the train crew because it doesn't seem there are enough of them working the train to get the task done and to keep up with the passengers getting on and off. On one trip the trainman did try to collect but everyone was buying the weekend tickets for \$8.00 each and he didn't have enough cash change to give people who were mostly giving him \$20. ...

"I just feel before they ask for a fare increase, they should collect from the passengers. I can't imagine how much money they have lost, especially if this is happening on all lines." — *Sharon Jaskiw, Mount Prospect*

I got this response from Metra spokesman Michael Gillis: "We are as frustrated as our riders are when we hear about the missed collection of fares." Gillis urged customers who witness missed collections to report it at <https://metrarail.com/contact-us>, so the railroad can investigate.

Transportation song quiz

Last week's train song warns of what could happen if you leave behind your pet in the cab while you get a meal. This song of tragedy narrowly averted is "Monkey and the Engineer," performed by the Grateful Dead. Matt Scotty of La Grange had the winning answer.

This week's song talks about a car mecca that attracts James Dean, Junior Johnson and Burt Reynolds. What is it? The first with the right answer gets a Tribune notebook and baseball cards.

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